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Humanimals: A Socio-Ecological Reading of the Marseille Plague of 1720

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to return to a small number of historically significant first-person testimonies of the Marseille epidemic of 1720 in order to analyse in detail their construction and depiction of human exceptionality as a form of life in a time of plague. We are specifically interested in how this sense of early modern human selfhood is compromised and problematized by its various interactions with other animals in the plague-infested city and, by extension, how plague reconfigures the dynamic forms of socio-ecological agency in eighteenth-century Marseille.

Keywords: animals, environment, France, Marseille, medical, plague, self

1. *Introduction*

The canon of European plague literature, from Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1353) through Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) and Alessandro Manzoni's *I promessi sposi* (1827) to Albert Camus's *La Peste* (1947), provides imaginative insights into the renegotiations of a sense of self when confronted with the plague.[1] However, these various literary works are, almost without exception, implicitly or explicitly, 'humanist' or 'anthropocentric' in their consideration of the interrelations of humanity and the plague. In contrast, this article seeks to interrogate certain key texts (including artwork) from the Marseille plague through a more expansive *socio-ecological* notion of human 'nature'. As such, it starts from a recognition of the human subject's inevitable entanglement with non-human species and their common embedding in a play of complex socio-ecological forces. This environmentally inflected understanding of selfhood intimates how individual human agency is transformed in the early modern epidemic by its sharing or hybridization among multiple agents, both human and non-human. These include the plague bacillus, fleas, ticks and, to varying degrees, rats, dogs, cats, horses, the climate, the built environment, the sea, etc.

In essence, the bubonic plague is a classic form of zoonosis: an infectious disease in which a virus, bacterium, fungus, parasite or prion crosses from an animal species to humans, causing illness. The plague then breaches a key taxonomic boundary between animal and human and challenges the anthropocentric conceptions of human selfhood.[2] Zoonotic diseases, like the plague, remind us that we move in dense, microbial communities, as well as in complex socio-ecological entanglements with other species. As a result, the notion of individualizing Western 'humanity' appears increasingly contingent and relational.[3] In the Marseille plague of 1720, the disease then sets in motion the decentring of an important early modern socio-ecological assumption about humanity, namely, the anthropocentric exceptionality of humankind as the highest form of life on earth, as expressed in humanity's fixed, superior status over non-human life in the Great Chain of Being.[4] This assumed exceptional status of humans over that of other lifeforms was bolstered by the anthropocentric ideologies of traditional Christian theology and mechanistic

Cartesian biology.[5] By extension, the advent of bubonic plague in the early modern city thus problematizes these other important ideological currents of eighteenth-century European thought.

2. *Critical Plague Studies and Marseille 1720*

But let us begin by laying out what the current medical and historiographical understanding of the Marseille plague is. As is now well established, plague is an infectious disease caused by the bacillus *Yersinia pestis*.[6] It is usually restricted to wild rodent populations, but since the Late Neolithic period, it has spilled over into humans, most commonly transmitted via arthropod vectors (fleas, lice). Major plague spillover events into humans are traditionally grouped into three long historical pandemics, each composed of multiple epidemic episodes often occurring across large geographical areas. It is the second plague pandemic that concerns us here. This is usually dated from the mid-fourteenth century, beginning with the catastrophic series of outbreaks composing the Black Death (1347–1353) in Europe, which killed approximately a third of the population, catalysing major socio-economic changes.[7] Thereafter, this particular strain of plague appears to have remained endemic in Europe, producing outbreaks somewhere on the continent almost every year from the mid-fourteenth century to the late seventeenth century.[8] The end point of the second plague pandemic is still open to debate, but in Europe at least, this is commonly situated in the eighteenth century in the virulent epidemics striking Marseille (1720–1722), Messina (1743) and Moscow (1771).[9]

This article focuses on the Marseille plague of 1720–1722, a devastating closing chapter of the second plague pandemic in Europe; and within this epidemic, we will primarily consider its advent and fatal first six months until approximately January 1721. The epidemic has traditionally been dated from the arrival in Marseille of the large merchant vessel *Le Grand Saint-Antoine*, returning in May 1720 from the Levant, with an infected crew and contaminated cargo of cotton bales, fabrics and other wares. Collusion between influential merchants, city magistrates and port authorities appears to have allowed less stringent quarantine controls to be applied to the crew and cargo of *Le Grand Saint-Antoine*, leading to the rapid infection of the quarantine stations in the port. From there, the disease swept first through the densely populated old town in July 1720 then through the rest of the city in August. It spread through large parts of Provence from September onwards. In the city of Marseille, the epidemic killed between 40,000 and 50,000 inhabitants (out of an estimated population of almost 100,000) and took the lives of a further 50,000 to 70,000 people across Provence. At its peak in late August 1720, 1000 people a day were dying in Marseille. Civic infrastructure was strained and intermittently collapsed, the port was closed, the was city isolated and, by early September, up to 8000 rotting corpses were piled in the streets, often grouped near hospitals and churches. The disease subsided over the autumn of 1720 and into early 1721, even if further, less severe, outbreaks occurred, notably in May–July 1722.[10] The city nonetheless recovered strongly from 1723 when the port reopened and full communication was restored with the rest of France and foreign ports.[11]

However, since the early twenty-first century, this established story of the Marseille epidemic coming 'from the East' by sea has been increasingly challenged.[12] This is largely the result of a 'genetic turn' in plague historiography, in which written documentation regarding historical epidemics is now complemented, complicated and, on occasion, contradicted by the physical evidence provided by the pathogen itself.[13] Thus, ancient

DNA (aDNA), usually extracted from the tooth pulp of historical plague victims in Marseille and other sites in Provence, has shown that the strain of plague involved in the 1720 outbreak is endemic to Europe and appears, in fact, to be identical to the strain of plague that ravaged London in 1665.[14] Thus, for the deadly Marseille epidemic, Paul Slack states that, on the basis of aDNA evidence, 'we can now say that the disease did not come from the Levant, and may not have come by ship at all'.[15] That said, the existing aDNA evidence alone is not conclusive in establishing the origins of the Marseille plague. The samples studied so far are relatively small, given the scale of the disaster, and no credible wild rodent plague reservoir has been located in or near Marseille as the source of the 1720 outbreak.[16] Hence, it is possible, even reasonable, to suggest that more than one strain of plague contributed, to varying degrees, to the Marseille epidemic — one endemic and another exogenous, the latter possibly brought from overseas but not necessarily from the Levant.[17] This new form of historical plague research continues apace, but the contributions of palaeogenetics to understanding the Marseille epidemic have already had the salutary historiographical effect of revising the 'Orientalist' interpretations of the epidemic in 1720, which themselves date back to the eighteenth century.[18]

Our own research in this article is less concerned with the contested origins of the Marseille plague. It concentrates instead on the lived experience of the epidemic as it unfolded. In this regard, the existing historical record is immensely rich. In addition to the seminal testimonies that we will draw on extensively in our analysis below, other important contemporary sources have been usefully collated in two substantial collections edited by Louis-François Jauffret in 1820 on the occasion of the centenary of the plague and by Paul Gaffarel and the Marquis de Duranty in 1911.[19] Municipal and regional archives have also been exhaustively consulted in late-twentieth-century studies of the plague that remain indispensable for comprehending the extent of its socio-economic impacts. Chief among these are the seminal works by Charles Carrière, Marcel Courdurié and Ferréol Rebuffat and by Jean-Noël Biraben (see footnote 10). Françoise Hildesheimer has similarly deepened our understanding of the plague in early modern France; and her recent *Des épidémies en France sous l'Ancien Régime: une relecture* (written in a time of COVID-19) places the Marseille epidemic in socio-historical context via a re-reading of key primary sources combined with the latest research on plague historiography.[20] One of Hildesheimer's principal perspectives concerning the tensions between national and local responses to the 1720 outbreak has also received renewed critical attention in recent research by Joël Coste, Cindy Ermus, Fleur Beauvieux and Nicolas Vidoni.[21] These studies broadly pit important shifts in State policy towards greater intervention in public health matters against local actions often improvised and coordinated by municipal and regional officials in collaboration with military commanders, doctors and local communities 'on the ground', so to speak.[22] Gilbert Buti has studied the religious ramifications of the epidemic.[23] Further recent research revisits the international reaction to the 1720 epidemic,[24] a reaction that also included a proliferation of medical treatises on the plague, published in major cities across Europe.[25] These treatises contribute to what Daniel Gordon has called the 'rise of plague literature' in eighteenth-century Europe, paradoxically at the very time when the second plague pandemic was petering out across the continent.[26] Of course, the shock of the deadly epidemic lasted longest locally. Hence, in addition to all of the above responses to the Marseille plague of 1720–1722, there is a significant commemorative and imaginative engagement with the epidemic that is recorded in diverse local *lieux de mémoire* and in French-language literature, from the eighteenth century onwards.[27]

3. *Principal Sources and Methodology*

However, as we have already mentioned, the originality of our approach to the Marseille plague centres on a more explicit socio-ecological interrogation of contemporary testimonies of the epidemic. To this end, we draw on a small number of classic primary sources produced by Marseille citizens actively involved in mitigating, then relating or depicting, the plague epidemic of 1720. Our three principal references are as follows:

i Jean-Baptiste Bertrand's *Relation historique de la peste de Marseille. En 1720* published in Cologne in 1721;
ii Nicolas Pichatty de Croissainte's *Journal abregé de ce qui s'est passé en la ville de Marseille, depuis qu'elle est affligée de la contagion* published in Paris in 1721;
iii the Spanish-born artist Michel Serre's painting, *Vue de l'hôtel de ville de Marseille pendant la peste de 1720*, finished in 1721 and now hanging in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Marseille.

Where appropriate, these core 'texts' will be supplemented with other contemporary accounts of life during the epidemic.

Bertrand was a respected local doctor who contracted the plague three times and amazingly survived, although he lost half of his family to the disease. His detailed chronicle of the evolution of the epidemic is accompanied by some telling medical reflections. Pichatty de Croissainte was a civic official and a recognized *orateur de la communauté* in Marseille, officiating at important public events; he worked in the Hôtel de Ville throughout the epidemic and provided an important account of the workings of the municipal administration in a time of plague. Finally, Serre was an established artist officially attached to the royal galley fleet based in Marseille; in 1720, he joined the corps of newly instituted public health commissioners and served in the right-bank Rive Neuve district of the city.[28] He painted a number of important tableaux of the Marseille plague based on his personal experience.

The choice of these primary sources is motivated by a number of factors. Firstly, they remain prominent references in the plague literature on the epidemic of 1720 and so can be seen as reliable and established records of what happened in Marseille at the time. Bertrand's text is over 500 pages long and is rich in social and medical details. Pichatty's account of the plague was published in haste in early 1721 and is just over one hundred pages in length, with a keen focus on the hardships endured by the municipal authorities and their officials in combatting the spread of the disease in the city. Serre's artwork, for its part, offers an alternative representation of citizenry confronting the plague in a different medium. All three sources present invaluable evidence of how the plague challenged and reconfigured perceptions of human exceptionality in the epidemic. But given the differing degrees of granularity of each work in its depiction of the plague, there is a greater reliance on Bertrand than the other works in our analysis. Most importantly, separately and in combination, these key testimonies of the Marseille plague of 1720 have hitherto not been read *socio-ecologically,* insofar as they allow a clearer appreciation of what the advent of bubonic plague means for human/non-human relations in an early modern urban environment.

This particular critical focus also has methodological implications. Firstly, it is less concerned with the diachronic development of the plague in Marseille as an event or series of event types; and so a 'dramaturgical' approach to the epidemic is not fitting here.[29] Secondly, a comparative socio-ecological reading of our primary sources on the Marseille epidemic lessens the need to see each reference as conforming to certain generic 'scripts' about the plague, as Colin Jones has previously presented them.[30] In principle, this

approach could be applied here, for example, reading Bertrand as subscribing to a primarily medical script, Pichatty to a political script and Serre to an aesthetic one, in their treatment of the epidemic. However, Jones's unifying factor for his various plague scripts is the 'concept of the body', by which he means the human body and its religious and social analogues.[31] Our focus, in contradistinction, is on *bodies* and specifically on human *and* non-human bodies in their fraught, tangled interactions as they share the experience of the plague moving in them, through them and between them in eighteenth-century Marseille. Hence, we proceed here by reading across our first-hand accounts of the plague, comparing or contrasting their discourses on the epidemic according to certain socio-ecological themes such as agency, animality, the abject and attempts to confer sanctity on human life alone. So let us now look at these themes in turn.

4. *Questions of Agency*

The first thing to note about the plague's impact on contemporary human selfhood in Marseille is its incredible efficacy in isolating the individual. As Bertrand explains in his *Relation*, the disease has the power to 'rompre toutes les liaisons du sang & de l'amitié, abolir l'amour conjugal, éteindre même l'amitié paternelle'.[32] Unlike the related Biblical scourges of famine and war, plague leaves no possibility for compassion or consolation among its victims. He states: 'Chaque particulier semble former une societé à part, & voudrait pouvoir se reserver jusqu'à l'air qu'il respire'.[33] As this striking reference to coveting even the air one breathes suggests, the plague is a unique form of disaster, insofar as the disaster itself is experienced as being individually and physically internalized. The overwhelming sense of fear and suspicion of one's fellow human beings is compounded by the fact that the plague manifests itself through a bewildering and contradictory variety of symptoms. Bertrand again notes: 'la peste adopte les symptomes de toutes les autres maladies'.[34] It incites in its victims languor and delirium, silence and babble, fever and chills; unsightly buboes and 'charbons' (necrotic black marks around fleabites) are sometimes visible, sometimes entirely absent; some sufferers have vomiting and diarrhoea, others insatiable appetites and a flush of healthiness and so on. As Stéphanie Genand notes, the plague is thus experienced as a pathological *Protée*, the disease of all diseases, a meta-disease.[35]

The plague in Marseille thus radically atomized its society. One striking consequence of this, as Bertrand has already indicated, was the consistent dehumanization of its victims. Pichatty's *Journal* reports that even helpless newborns orphaned by the disease were not taken in elsewhere for fear that they carried the plague. He writes: 'la crainte de prendre cet horrible mal étouffe tous les sentimens de la charité, & ceux même de l'humanité'.[36] Writing more than fifty years after the epidemic, Nicolas Fournier, a young medical student at the time and an eyewitness to the Marseille epidemic, recalls that this dehumanizing power of the plague was internalized by its victims. The terrified residents distractedly cast themselves out of human society, even of humankind:

> Ils cherchent tous avec un trouble & un égarement inexprimables, quelque habitation & quelque retraite qui puisse les *séparer de l'espece humaine*; mais partout où se retirent ces victimes infortunées, elles ne peuvent échapper au venin mortel qui paroît les poursuivre [...].[37]

It also follows from this representation of the plague that the disease becomes the principal actor in the city; its terrified citizens reduced to blighted, passive objects. As a terror-stricken degree zero of sociability diminishes the subject's capacity to act meaningfully, the plague itself gains in personality, in agency.[38] Bertrand thus presents the disease's initial dissemination through the streets of the old town as an autonomous stalking from house to house: 'le mal [...] se glissoit furtivement, & de loin en loin en diverses maisons'.[39] It becomes a malicious personification of evil: 'le mal se joüant des précautions des uns, & de l'incredulité des autres, pulluloit secretement'.[40]

As we have noted, the disturbing array of symptoms produced by the plague did not allow for an early medical consensus to emerge regarding the disease's aetiology and epidemiology. In fact, this confusion stoked a divisive contemporary debate among medical professions as to the causes and means of propagation of the plague. In one camp were the physicians who largely believed that pestilential infection was airborne; opposing them were doctors who championed the notion that the disease spread primarily through physical contact. This division was marked by the terms of *épidémie* for airborne infection and *contagion* for physical transmission. The privileged conception of transmission was important for the inhabitants of Marseille because it entailed different mitigating actions: in the case of an 'epidemic' disease, citizens should flee as far as possible from the contaminated air or disinfect it thoroughly when flight was not an option. Conversely, in the face of 'contagion', they should isolate themselves as much as possible from contact with suspected plague carriers.[41] At its most extreme, this medical schism pitted a State-sanctioned delegation of 'epidemicist' doctors from Montpellier against a clique of local doctors from Marseille who cleaved to a 'contagionist' understanding of the plague.[42] The contest was unequal, as the first group of doctors was backed by such august bodies as the Université de la Sorbonne and by the Regent's own physician, Pierre Chirac, who went so far as to claim (from the safety of Paris) that the plague could be self-induced through extreme terror of contracting it, as though it were a transmissible psychosomatic disorder.[43] Bertrand, who belonged firmly in the 'contagionist' camp, scoffed at Chirac's long-distance diagnosis:

> Que ceux qui ne voïent la Peste que de loin, ne la regardent que comme l'effet d'une terreur publique, c'est une opinion qu'on peut leur passer; ils la voïoient de plus près, ils sont assès de bonne foy pour avoüer leur méprise, & assès jaloux de leur reputation pour ne pas s'entêter contre l'experience.[44]

This last point is important, since the growing empirical confidence in a contagionist model of plague transmission more readily calls into question the distinct species boundaries between humans and other animals, a distinction that is integral to contemporary anthropocentric worldviews (humanist, Cartesian and Christian). To give one fascinating, if vaguely repulsive, example, in early August 1720, Pichatty cites a revealing by-law published by the Marseille magistrates forbidding butchers in local abattoirs to blow air into the mouths of slaughtered sheep and cows to make their carcasses easier to skin. It was thought that if an infected person blew into the carcass 'la peste peut se communiquer à la viande' and so infect those who subsequently ate it.[45] The law stipulated that bellows were to be used instead, on pain of death. But through a socio-ecological lens, this also suggests that the city doctors and civic leaders acknowledged the possibility of a dangerous porosity of animal/human boundaries concerning the plague.

5. *Animality in the Plague*

The key scientific breakthrough in understanding the multispecies transmissibility of the plague came from the experiments of the Montpellier doctor Antoine Deidier who had initially come to Marseille as a believer in the 'epidemic' theories of plague transmission. Yet when successive autopsies of human cadavers revealed enlarged gall bladders, Deidier conjectured that the plague's 'venin' arises in the victim's bile. To test his theory, he injected the infected bile of a deceased plague victim into a healthy dog, which died four days later, after having manifested the symptoms typically seen in human plague sufferers. He also proved animal-to-animal contagion by the same process. This experiment, repeated several times, belatedly converted Deidier to the contagionist cause.[46] As Olivier Dutour has argued, Deidier's experiments during the plague were among the first conducted on animals that were not purely anatomical.[47] Rather, they were predicated on a multispecies continuum linking humans and non-humans proven by the transmissibility of the plague between the former and latter. This assumption on the part of the physician may have been facilitated by a concomitant 'reading' of the animal in terms of human emotionality. That is, Deidier was just as attentive to the altered affects and behaviour of his infected dogs as he was to those of his human patients. He writes of the canine subject in his first experiment: 'tout-à-coup voilà mon chien de gay devenir triste; de vorace entièrement dégouté; d'éveillé stupide; et peu après atteint d'un bubon et de deux charbons qui l'emportèrent dans quatre jours'.[48]

Dogs also feature in a further, more widespread and troubling, threat to individualizing Western 'humanity' experienced in the Marseille epidemic. This was the sheer undifferentiation of animal and human corpses in death, especially those in states of advanced putrefaction, as the bodies of thousands of dead lay rotting together in the late summer sun. As seventeenth-century regulations already make clear, the slaughter of stray animals, especially cats and dogs, was one of the basic public health measures to be first taken in the face of a plague outbreak.[49] In Marseille, this took place, but as Bertrand indicates, it was undertaken less as part of a planned civic response than as a haphazard, panic-induced culling that actually polluted the streets and waters of the port with dead dogs, increasing the risk of spreading infectious diseases in the process. He writes:

> [...] on les [ces animaux] chassoit de par tout & chacun tiroit sur eux; on en fit aussi-tôt un massacre, qui remplit en peu de jours toutes les ruës de Chiens morts; on en jetta dans le Port une quantité prodigieuse, que la mer rejetta sur les bords, d'où la chaleur du Soleil en élevoit une infection si forte, qu'elle faisoit éviter cet endroit, qui est des plus agréables, & le seul où l'on pouvoit passer librement.[50]

Moreover, this merciless war declared on dogs and other stray animals was not triggered by a municipal edict — let alone as a reasoned consequence of Deidier's experimentation — but by febrile rumour and prejudice. An anonymous eyewitness to the carnage, most likely a priest, who published an account of the epidemic in late 1720, corroborates this point, writing that the streets were choked with human corpses, infected clothing and 'des chats et des chiens, que la crainte qu'ils ne communiquassent le mal, avait fait tuer'.[51] That is, the assumption of infection by physical contact with cats and dogs was used to justify the slaughter of thousands of domestic animals but without drawing on any medical evidence to validate it. The real contagion behind the mass cat and dog cull was thus not one of infectious disease but of unfounded rumour. Human social networks in early

eighteenth-century Marseille proved effective conduits of both true and false information about the disease. As such, they partook in practices of discursive transmission, especially of rumour, that often involved what Marie-Hélène Huet calls a 'logic of proliferation', which replicated, or even exceeded, that of the plague itself.[52] Pichatty sums up the consequences of the indiscriminate mingling of putrefying human and animal corpses in the Marseille streets and port:

> Tous les chiens & les chats que l'on tue, sont par surcroît entremêlés par tout, avec les cadavres, les malades & les hardes pestiferés, & ces charognes sont horribles dans l'enflure extraordinaire que leur cause la pourriture, tout le port est rempli de celles des environs qui y sont jettées, & semblent n'y surnager que pour mieux joindre leur puanteur à l'infection generale qui est dans toute la Ville qui saisit le cœur, l'esprit & les sens.[53]

This generalized cross-species deliquescence in death also has the effect, as Pichatty recounts it, of dissolving a sense of discrete human subjectivity in those who witness it, reduced as they are to the overwhelmed receptive faculties of 'heart, mind and senses'.

6. *Abjection: Plague Ontologies in Marseille 1720*

As this last citation makes clear, the unsettling porosity at work here was not just between species but also between the states of life and death. That the ontological divide between the dead and dying was all but erased in the epidemic is confirmed by an anecdote relayed by the doctor Jean-Jacques Bruhier d'Ablaincourt. In his 1749 treatise on the difficulties of certifying death in the moribund, he claims that a surgeon in Marseille in 1720 overheard two *corbeaux* — galley slaves released under military supervision to clear the streets of corpses — describing one body loaded onto a cart for burial as *proun mouert* in Provençal, or *assez mort* ('dead enough') in French.[54] That is, the plague victim was clinically still alive but cynically deemed close enough to death to be dumped in a mass grave. What is more, towards the end of August and the start of September, as bodies liquefied in piles in the heat, any sense of individuality in the dead was literally dissolved in the polluted waters of the city gutters. Bertrand writes of these decaying cadavers: 'Quelques'uns étoient à demi pourris, & si fort corrompus que les chairs délayées par l'eau du ruisseau, couloient en lambeaux avec elle'.[55] Elsewhere, the *corbeaux* were obliged to remove the cadavers limb by rotting limb. Pichatty gives a further macabre twist to these depictions of ubiquitous death and dissolution: 'ces cadavres n'ont aucune forme humaine, ce sont des monstres qui font horreur, & l'on diroit que tous leurs membres remuent, par le mouvement qu'y donnent les Vers qui travaillent à les detacher'.[56] The amassed undifferentiated dead appear undead; maggots wriggling in the corpses perversely give them the appearance of life. But this is life that is monstrous, no longer having recognizable human form. It becomes a sort of post-human, posthumous life. In this disquieting state, somewhere between subject and object, the 'undead' cadavers of Marseille's plague victims correspond to Julia Kristeva's unsettling ontological category of the 'abject'.[57]

This deeply troubling ontological ambivalence produced by the plague in its sufferers is also captured in pictorial representations of the Marseille plague of 1720. Yves Baille has estimated that there were over 170 baroque artworks from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that took the plague as their subject.[58] For the Marseille epidemic, Jacques Rigaud and Michel Serre in particular provide important visual testimony as to

how the plague afflicted the city and its people.[59] We will look specifically at one painting by Michel Serre, his *Vue de l'hôtel de ville de Marseille pendant la peste de 1720* (1721).[60]

On a first viewing, one of the most striking aspects of the painting is the amount of space that the tableau gives over to the built environment, specifically to the classical façade of the Hôtel de Ville. The historian Régis Bertrand contends that the predominance of architectural solidity and symmetry in the painting is designed to contrast the barbarism of the plague with the enlightened civilization of the thriving port city, representing 'le retour d'un fléau d'un autre âge dans le décor de la modernité urbaine de l'âge baroque, le désordre de la mort dans une architecture ordonnancée'.[61] Serre's painting also deploys a colour scheme that develops another telling contrast between the brighter hues picking out the living, most notably those individuals in command and on horseback, and the livid greens and dull greys of putrefying corpses being variously dragged on sheets and ropes and carried, even piecemeal, on boards to be dumped in carts. It thus offers a sliding chromatic scale of human 'life' from the most alive to the most decayed, from recognizable heroes, such as the bishop Henri François Xavier de Belsunce and the chevalier Nicolas Roze, to the anonymous, amorphous piles of deliquescing cadavers on the quayside. The high point of this life/death contrast is an infant with rosy skin in bright blue trousers suckling voraciously at the breast of its mother's sickly greenish corpse. This pictorial trope going back to the Renaissance represents the sheer inhumanity wrought by plague epidemics on human communities.[62] But, as contemporaries such as Pichatty make clear, in Marseille in 1720, the image of the infant feeding on the diseased mother also confirmed the medical belief that breastfeeding babies took in the plague's 'venom' through breast milk and died shortly after having ingested it. (Current medical research, however, suggests that this form of transmission is highly improbable in cases of the bubonic plague.)[63]

Serre's tableau of pestilential horrors also contains in detail the image of abandoned or stray dogs feeding on human corpses. As such, these ravenous hounds stand as a fascinating counterpoint to the passive canine subjects in Deidier's experiments on plague contagiousness and give alternative impetus to their panicked mass culling. For in the artist's gruesome plague-scape, the anthropocentric superiority of humankind over other species is visually and viciously overturned; its divinely ordained distinction from animals mocked.[64] The trope of dogs feasting on human corpses as the greatest profanation of the unique sanctity of human life is a constant of western European culture from the first book of the *Iliad* onwards (its initial occurrence in Homer's foundational text also features the ravages wrought by plague).[65] And yet, in Serre's painting, this trope — combined with that of the infant feasting on its dead mother's milk — also suggests that forms of human and non-human life survive and persist, if not thrive, in the alternative socio-ecological system engendered by plague.[66]

7. *Meta/Physical Attempts to Segregate Humans and Non-Humans*

Bertrand is clearly aware of the continuum of life forces inextricably linking the plague, animals and humans. In keeping with the language of the period, these life forces fall under the general term 'nature'. Hence, the concluding remarks of his account of the 1720 epidemic recommend a return to 'le langage & les maximes des anciens, dont toute l'application étoit d'observer & de suivre les mouvemens de la nature'.[67] Only nature can remedy nature: a physician and plague victim must therefore stimulate the diseased body to produce '*un effort de la nature* [...] *pour chasser un ennemi étranger*'; that is, redirect

the body's own reactions to the disease in order to cleanse itself of infection.[68] Nonetheless, as this last military metaphor suggests, the only way that a semblance of discrete wholeness, of individualized 'humanity', can be restored to the plague sufferer is by the naturally occurring ejection of the invasive illness and, by implication, the erection of more effective barriers to prevent further infection. In a city that the military commander Charles Claude Andrault de Langeron had successfully, but belatedly, cordoned off, the human subject is just one unit in the concentric circles of enclosure attempting to keep the plague out. From province, through 'terroir', city, parish, street, house, family, to body — enclosure is the surest means of protecting against infection but also of re-establishing a sense of interiority, including for the early modern self.[69]

Interestingly, earlier in his work, Bertrand had replicated rhetorically the plague's own invasive processes in order to portray its ravages more compellingly. The reader is thus projected imaginatively into a diseased household: 'Entrons pour un moment dans ces maisons affligées [...]'. There follow a dozen pages detailing the disintegration of all social and familial bonds inside the house, culminating in the plague's violation of the most intimate of bodily sanctuaries, the womb. Bertrand relates an improvised caesarean operation carried out on a dying woman that saved her baby long enough for it to be baptized before it too succumbed to the disease. The passage finishes: 'Sortons de ces lieux affligés [...]'.[70] Here, no interiority, bodily or otherwise, is impervious to the disease; no subjectivity remains plague-proof.

What is interesting in this last example is the metaphysical surety of baptism, and its promise of an eternal afterlife for the soul saved, that stands as a last desperate defence against the physical onslaught of the plague. This also applies to the increasingly poignant attempts made by the dying to secure the last rites that are recorded in all of the accounts of the epidemic of 1720, including in Serre's artwork. In turn, this relates to another all-too-human interpretation of the plague as a form of divine punishment visited upon Marseille because of the wanton sinfulness of its inhabitants.[71] A different form of human selfhood is evoked in this conception of the plague, centred on the person of the sinner, and thus on an internalized sense of sin. Interestingly, sin can thus stand as a counterpart to the plague bacterium, as they constitute respectively metaphysical and physical interiorizations of the disaster afflicting the city.

But if humans are culpable of bringing the plague on Marseille through their impious behaviour, sin thus acts as a means of retrieving a form of human agency in the face of the epidemic. As Lydia Barnett has argued, this is a particularly Catholic form of physico-theology developed in early eighteenth-century Europe, according to which sinning humans are not just victims of God's wrath but 'active, if unwitting, coproducers of environmental disaster'.[72] In this way, sinful, fallen humans recover a tragic form of subjective agency, one denied to animals and other non-human lifeforms by both Cartesian nature and Christian scripture. God remains the first inscrutable cause of the plague, but humans retain the power to acknowledge their sinfulness and act on this acknowledgement through individual and collective prayer and repentance, most spectacularly performed in the processions of barefoot penitence orchestrated by the charismatic bishop of Marseille, Henri de Belsunce.[73] The unique bond between a Christian God and humankind is thus restored, as are both a human-centred understanding of the plague and the discrete hierarchies of the Great Chain of Being.

Nonetheless, as Bertrand and Pichatty record, the sincere articulation of prayer and penitence in plague-ridden Marseille is often drowned out in a soundscape of suffering dominated by inarticulate cries, moans, babbling and wailing. 'On n'entend de tous côtés', writes Pichatty, 'que cris, que pleurs, que plaintes, que sanglots, que gémissemens, que

désolation, qu'effroy, que desespoir'.[74] In other words, an outpouring of animalistic noise scrambles the clear expression of an exclusive human–divine exchange as both cause (sin) and expiation (repentance) of the plague.

In conclusion, it is clear that the plague epidemic affected all aspects of daily life in early modern Marseille. As the close reading of our primary sources has indicated, this also meant that an exclusively human sense of self was challenged and compromised by the plague. The disease effectively isolated individuals, atomized society and dehumanized its victims. It troubled emerging notions of an autonomous, largely rational, human agency by variously redistributing it among multiple non-human agents. At its most extreme, this altered state of human selfhood reduced the inhabitants of Marseille to passive conduits and victims of plague while the pathogen itself assumes the status of pervasive, malevolent personhood.

Similarly, in the epidemic in Marseille, an increased sensitivity to the porous boundaries of human and non-human natures is exemplified by the fears of animal/human infection. A more positive medical counterpart to this finds expression in the contagionist model of plague transmission between species, as demonstrated in Antoine Deidier's experiments on dogs. Elsewhere, it manifests itself more violently and ambivalently in the mass culling of domestic and stray animals suspected of communicating the disease to humans. There is, understandably, resistance to this conception of humanity as just one vulnerable lifeform among others in the city, as epitomized by Michel Serre's use of colour to give heroic pre-eminence to city officials in his paintings of the plague-ridden port. But even here, their uniquely human heroism is compromised among infants feeding at the breast of dead mothers and dogs scavenging on human corpses. Other attempts by military or ecclesiastic authorities to re-impose a physical or metaphysical sense of unique sanctity on the human subject — by cordon sanitaire, last rites or prayer — are shown to be equally wanting. Eyewitness accounts and representations of the plague epidemic thus acknowledge, sometimes despite themselves, that human selfhood in Marseille in 1720 holds but a contingent, relative place in the city's complex, shifting socio-ecological systems, in which 'humanimal' interactions take on stark, new significance.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from Dr David McCallam at https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/slc/people/academic/david-mccallam. These data were derived from the following resources available in the public domain: University of Sheffield, https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/.

NOTES

1. For a fascinating work exploring how plague becomes a specifically literary construct in the early modern period, see Brenton Hobart, *La Peste à la Renaissance: L'imaginaire d'un fléau dans la littérature au XVIe siècle* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2020).

2. This is a rapidly developing research field. See, for example, *Feral Atlas: The More-Than-Human Anthropocene* <https://feralatlas.org/> [accessed 6 August 2024]. For a more general introduction to animal studies, see *Animal Subjects: An Ethical Reader in a Posthuman World*, ed. by Carla Jodey Castricano (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2008).

3. Or, as Genese Marie Sodikoff puts it, in an analogous study of the impact of rabies on human self-perceptions in contemporary Madagascar, 'we begin to suspect that the human self is chimeric and epiphenomenal'. See Genese Marie Sodikoff, 'Multispecies Epidemiology and the Viral Subject',

in *The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*, ed. by Ursula K. Heise, Jon Christensen and Michelle Niemann (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 112–19 (p. 114).

4. The classic study here is Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971). For an interesting critique of this expression of anthropocentrism, see Tom Tyler, 'The Exception and the Norm: The Dimensions of Anthropocentrism', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Animals and Literature*, ed. by Susan McHugh, Robert McKay and John Miller (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 15–36.

5. See Philippe Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005).

6. Fatality rates for untreated bubonic plague are between 40% and 60%; pneumonic plague is even deadlier, with fatality rates of close to 100% if not immediately treated with antibiotics. For an overview of the plague bacillus and the history of its interactions with humanity, see *Yersinia pestis: Retrospective and Perspective*, ed. by Ruifu Yang and Andrey Anisimov (Berlin: Springer, 2016).

7. For an updated annotated bibliography of the voluminous literature on the second plague pandemic, focusing on the pre-1500 epidemics, see Joris Roosen and Monica H. Green, 'The Mother of All Pandemics: the State of Black Death Research in the Era of COVID-19 — Bibliography' <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1x0D_dwyAwp9xi9sMCW5UvpGfEVH5J2ZA/view> [latest update 30 August 2023; accessed 4 August 2024]; for a further bibliography focusing on the post-1500 epidemics, see Daniel R. Curtis, 'Bibliography: Historical Plagues and Other Diseases' <https://www.academia.edu/36774191/Bibliography_Historical_plagues_and_other_diseases> [consulted 4 August 2024].

8. Paul Slack, *Plague: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 34.

9. For a brilliant overview of second-plague-pandemic studies, including research calling into question the end date of this pandemic, see Nükhet Varlık, 'Plague in the Mediterranean and Islamicate World', *Isis*, 114.S1 (2023), 313–62 (especially pp. 328–39) <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/726989>. For the Moscow plague, see John T. Alexander, *Bubonic Plague in Early Modern Russia: Public Health and Urban Disaster* (Baltimore, MA: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

10. The standard references here are Charles Carrière, Marcel Courdurié and Ferréol Rebuffat, *Marseille ville morte. La peste de 1720* (Marseille: [1968]; repr. Éditions Jeanne Lafitte, 2020) and Jean-Noël Biraben, *Les hommes et la peste en France et dans les pays européens et méditerranéens* (Paris: De Gruyter Mouton, 1975), I, 230–332. The story of *Le Grand Saint-Antoine* remained the accepted version of the origins and spread of the plague into the early twenty-first century; see, for example, Laurence Brockliss and Colin Jones, *The Medical World of Early Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 347–52; and Slack, *Plague: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 28–29.

11. For fascinating reflections and a useful historiography on the tail-off of epidemics, including that of Marseille, see Erica Charters and Kristin Heitman, 'How Epidemics End', *Centaurus*, 63.1 (2021), 210–24 <https://doi.org/10.1111/1600-0498.12370>.

12. This is what Nükhet Varlık has termed 'epidemiological orientalism'. See Nükhet Varlık, '"Oriental Plague" or Epidemiological Orientalism? Revisiting the Plague Episteme of the Early Modern Mediterranean', in *Plague and Contagion in the Islamic Mediterranean: New Histories of Disease in Ottoman Society*, ed. by Nükhet Varlık (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), pp. 57–88.

13. See, for example, Monica H. Green, 'A New Definition of the Black Death: Genetic Findings and Historical Interpretations', *De Medio Aevo*, 11.2 (2022), 139–55.

14. Kirsten I. Bos and others, 'Eighteenth Century *Yersinia pestis* Genomes Reveal the Long-Term Persistence of an Historic Plague Focus', *eLife* (2016) <https://doi.org/10.7554/eLife.12994>; also Nükhet Varlık, 'Rethinking the History of Plague in the time of COVID-19', *Centaurus*, 62.2 (2020), 285–93.

15. Paul Slack, 'Perceptions of plague in eighteenth-century Europe', *Economic History Review*, 75.1 (2022), 138–56 (p. 142).

16. See Nils Stenseth and others, 'No Evidence for Persistent Natural Plague Reservoirs in Historical or Modern Europe', *PNAS*, 119 (2022) <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2209816119>.

17. This seems to be confirmed by the most recent palaeogenetic research on plague victims from the 1720–1722 epidemic. See Pierre Clavel and others, 'Improving the Extraction of Ancient *Yersinia pestis* Genomes from the Dental Pulp', *iScience*, 26.5 (2023) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.isci.2023.106787>.

18. See, for example, chevalier Louise de Jaucourt's influential article 'Peste (Médecine)', in *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. by Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert (Neuchâtel: Samuel Faulche, 1765), XII, 452–56. See also Varlık, '"Oriental Plague"'; and Lori Jones, '"Turkey Is Almost a Perpetual Seminary": Relocating Pathogenic Plague Environments', in *Disease and the Environment in the Medieval and Early Modern Worlds*, ed. by Lori Jones (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 67–90.

19. *Pièces historiques sur la peste de Marseille et d'une partie de la Provence, en 1720, 1721, et 1722*, ed. by Louis-François Jauffret, 2 vols (Marseille: Chez les principaux libraires, 1820); *La peste de 1720 à Marseille et en France d'après des documents inédits*, ed. by Paul Gaffarel and the Marquis de Duranty (Paris: Perrin, 1911).

20. Françoise Hildesheimer, *La terreur et la pitié: L'Ancien Régime à l'épreuve de la peste* (Paris: Publisud, 1990); Françoise Hildesheimer, *Des épidémies en France sous l'Ancien Régime: une relecture* (Paris: Nouveau Monde éditions, 2021).

21. Joël Coste, 'Chirac, la Cour et la peste de Provence (juillet 1720–avril 1721)', in *Santé et médecine à la cour de France (XVIe–XVIIIe siècles)*, ed. by S. Perez and J. Vons (Paris: Bibliothèque interuniversitaire de santé, 2018), pp. 113–37; Cindy Ermus, 'The Plague of Provence: Early Advances in the Centralization of Crisis Management', *Arcadia*, 9 (2015) <https://www.environmentandsociety.org/arcadia/plague-provence-early-advances-centralization-crisis-management> [accessed 5 August 2024]; Fleur Beauvieux, 'Épidémie, pouvoir municipal et transformation de l'espace urbain: La peste de 1720–1722 à Marseille', *Rives Méditerranéennes*, 42.2 (2012), 29–50; Nicolas Vidoni, 'The Public's Role in Vigilance against Plague and Political Authority in Early Eighteenth-Century France', in *Vigilance and the Plague: France Confronted with the Epidemic Scourge during the 17th and 18th Centuries*, ed. by Sébastien Demichel and Marc Sven Hengerer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024), pp. 125–54 <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111026169-006>.

22. For a more comprehensive understanding of Marseille's civic governance in the early modern period, see Junko Thérèse Takeda, *Between Crown and Commerce: Marseille and the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

23. Gilbert Buti, *Colère de Dieu, mémoire des hommes. La peste en Provence 1720–2020* (Paris: CERF, 2020); also Régis Bertrand, *Henri de Belsunce (1670–1755). L'évêque de la peste de Marseille* (Marseille: Éditions Gaussen, 2020).

24. Cindy Ermus, *The Great Plague Scare of 1720: Disaster and Diplomacy in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Denis Reynaud and Samy Ben Messaoud, 'La gestion médiatique du désastre: la peste de Marseille, 1720', in *L'Invention de la catastrophe au XVIIIe siècle: du châtiment divin au désastre naturel*, ed. by Anne-Marie Mercier-Faivre and Chantal Thomas (Geneva: Droz, 2008), pp. 199–207.

25. See Stéphanie Genand, 'Fléau ou catastrophe? Les enjeux du discours médical: la peste de Marseille, 1720', in *L'Invention de la catastrophe au XVIIIe siècle*, ed. by Mercier-Faivre and Thomas, pp. 303–18.

26. Daniel Gordon, 'The City and the Plague in the Age of Enlightenment', *Yale French Studies*, 92 (1997), 67–87 (p. 67).

27. Cindy Ermus, 'Memory and the Representation of Public Health Crises: Remembering the Plague of Provence in the Tricentennial', *Environmental History*, 26 (2021), 776–88 <https://doi.org/10.1093/envhis/emab046>; Michel Signoli and others, 'Du corps au cadavre pendant la Grande Peste de Marseille (1720–1722). Des données ostéo-archéologiques et historiques aux représentations sociales d'une épidémie', *Bulletin et Mémoire de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris*, 10.1-2 (1998), 99–120 (pp. 100–05).

28. On the new public health commissioners, see Fleur Beauvieux and Nicolas Vidoni, 'Dispositifs de contrôle, police et résistances pendant la peste de 1720', *Études Héraultaises*, 55 (2020), 53–63.

29. See Charles E. Rosenberg, 'What Is an Epidemic? AIDS in Historical Perspective', *Daedalus*, 118.2 (1992), 1–17; and Samuel K. Cohn, Jr's more recent critical interrogation of Rosenberg's much cited article, 'The Dramaturgy of Epidemics', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 94 (2020), 578–89.

30. Colin Jones, 'Plague and its Metaphors in Early Modern France', *Representations*, 53 (1996), 97–127 (p. 108).

31. Jones, 'Plague and its Metaphors', p. 108.

32. Jean-Baptiste Bertrand, *Relation historique de la peste de Marseille. En 1720* (Cologne: Pierre Marteau, 1721), p. 4. Spelling and punctuation are retained from all primary sources, and my own English translations are given in the relevant footnotes: '[the power] to break all the bonds of blood and friendship, to abolish conjugal love, even to extinguish paternal affection'.

33. Bertrand, *Relation*, p. 4. 'Each individual seems to form a society apart and would like to be able to reserve for himself alone the very air he breathes'.

34. Bertrand, *Relation*, p. 156. 'Plague adopts the symptoms of all other diseases'.

35. Genand, 'Fléau ou catastrophe?', p. 304; see also Jones, 'Plague and its Metaphors', pp. 98–100.

36. Nicolas Pichatty de Croissainte, *Journal Abregé de ce qui s'est passé en Marseille, depuis qu'elle est affligée de la contagion* (Paris: Henry Charpentier, Jacques Josse, & Pierre Prault, 1721), p. 52. 'The fear of catching this horrible disease stifles all feelings of charity, even those of common humanity'.

37. Nicolas Fournier, *Observations sur la nature et le traitement de la fièvre pestilentielle, ou la peste* (Dijon: L. N. Frantin, 1777), pp. 14–15 (my italics). 'All look with inexpressible confusion and distraction for some dwelling place and retreat which would be able to separate them from humankind; but everywhere these unfortunate victims retire to, they cannot escape the deadly poison that appears to pursue them'.

38. Hildesheimer, *La terreur et la pitié*, p. 24.

39. Bertrand, *Relation*, p. 40: 'the disease slipped furtively, far and wide, into different houses'; see also Pichatty, *Journal*, p. 90, for the same image.

40. Bertrand, *Relation*, p. 44. 'The disease, making a mockery of some people's precautions and of other people's incredulity, proliferated in secret'.

41. Marie-Hélène Huet, *The Culture of Disaster* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), pp. 30–31.

42. Brockliss and Jones, *The Medical World*, pp. 354–56.

43. See Coste, 'Chirac, la Cour et la peste'. In the immediate term, adepts of airborne infection such as Chirac prevailed, even if, as Cindy Ermus has shown, the Marseille epidemic of 1720 would ultimately prove a turning point in favour of 'contagionist' thinking about the spread of plague. See Cindy Ermus, 'Managing Disaster and Understanding Disease and the Environment in the Early Eighteenth Century', in *Disease and the Environment in the Medieval and Early Modern Worlds*, ed. by Jones, pp. 91–106.

44. Bertrand, *Relation*, p. 384. 'That those who only view plague from afar see it as but the effect of general terror is an opinion that we can forgive them. If they see it close-up, they have enough good faith to admit their error and enough pride in their reputation not to stubbornly gainsay experience'.

45. Pichatty, *Journal*, pp. 33–34. 'Plague can be transmitted to the meat'. It is feasible, but not always certain, that plague could infect the meat in this way. As far as the consumption of this infected meat is concerned, a recent study suggests that the so-called 'pharyngeal' or 'gastrointestinal' plague can be contracted when humans eat raw or undercooked meat of plague-infested animals. See Jae-Llane Ditchburn and Ryan Hodgkins, '*Yersinia pestis*, a Problem of the Past and a Re-emerging Threat', *Biosafety and Health*, 1 (2019), 65–70.

46. Antoine Deidier, *Dissertation, où l'on établi [sic] un sentiment particulier sur la contagion de la peste: le Latin à côté: pour l'ouverture solemnelle de l'Ecole de Médecine de Montpellier, fait le 22 octobre 1725* (Paris: Charles-Maurice d'Houry, 1726); Olivier Dutour, 'Antoine Deidier, son approche expérimentale de la contagiosité de la peste à Marseille en 1720', *Histoire des Sciences Médicales*, 45.1 (2011), 45–50. For a sustained contemporary overview of Deidier's evolving ideas and experiments during the plague, see Bertrand, *Relation*, pp. 393–431.

47. Dutour, 'Antoine Deidier, son approche expérimentale', p. 48; also Michel Signoli, 'La mission médicale montpelliéraine à Marseille, lors de l'épidémie de peste de 1720: une étape importante dans la recherche épidémiologique', *Études héraultaises*, 55 (2020), 65–74.

48. Cited in Dutour, 'Antoine Deidier, son approche expérimentale', p. 47. 'Suddenly here was my dog turning from cheerful to sad; from ravenous to unable to eat; from alert to lethargic; and shortly after afflicted with a bubo and two necrotic marks that carried it off in four days'.

49. See, for instance, the *Arrest de la Cour de Parlement*, issued by the Aix Parlement in July 1629 'sur le fait de la Peste', containing 127 articles of anti-plague measures, including XXXXVIII (12): 'Les Officiers & Consuls feront tuer tous les Chiens & les Chats tant en Ville qu'au terroir'. ['Municipal Officials and Magistrates will have all dogs and cats killed both in the city and in its environs']. *Arrest de la Cour de Parlement tenant la Chambre des Vacations. Contenant Reglement sur le fait de la Peste. Du 17 Juillet 1629*. This ruling was re-published by the State printer Joseph David in Aix, 1720. <https://odyssee.univ-amu.fr/items/show/682> [last accessed 06 August 2024].

For a fascinating study of how the plague epidemic appears to have had a longer-term disruptive effect on human–canine relations in Marseille, see Emmanuel Porte, 'L'émergence d'un nuisible. Peste et recomposition des communautés « anthropocanines » (Marseille 1720–1759)', in *Les Animaux sont dans la place. La longue histoire d'une cohabitation*, ed. by Fabrice Guizard and Corinne Beck (Amiens: Encrage Édition, 2019), pp. 61–76.

50. Bertrand, *Relation*, p. 170. '[These animals] were chased everywhere and everyone took shots at them; they were soon massacred, filling up the streets with dead dogs in a matter of days; a huge number were thrown into the port, which the sea then washed back on land, where the heat of the sun caused them to reek so strongly that people avoided this place, even though it was one of the most pleasant, and the only place where people could move freely'.

51. *Discours sur ce qui s'est passé à Marseille pendant la Contagion, en 1720* (Marseille: Jean-Antoine Mallard, 1720), in *Pièces historiques sur la peste de Marseille*, I, 278–311 (p. 301): 'By cats and dogs killed because of the fear that they could spread the disease'. See also Bertrand, *Relation*, p. 170.

52. Huet, *The Culture of Disaster*, p. 29.

53. Pichatty, *Journal*, pp. 80–81. 'All the dogs and cats that are killed are furthermore heaped together everywhere with the dead and dying and infected clothing, and this carrion is gruesome in the extraordinary swelling caused by its rotting, so the port is completely full of these rotting corpses that are thrown into it, and that seem to only float there the better to add their stench to the general infection in the city, which strikes one's mind, heart and senses'.

54. Jean-Jacques Bruhier d'Ablaincourt, *Dissertation sur l'incertitude des signes de la mort, et l'abus des enterremens, & Embaumens précipités*, 2nd edition, 2 vols (Paris: De Bure l'Aîné, 1749), II, 423.

55. Bertrand, *Relation*, p. 166. 'Some of them were half-rotten, and so decayed that their flesh soaking in the gutters flowed away in strips with the water'.

56. Pichatty, *Journal*, p. 115. 'These corpses have no human form, they are horrifying monsters and one would say that their limbs still move, thanks to the movement given to them by maggots working to detach them'.

57. See Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: Essai sur l'abjection* (Paris: Seuil, 1980).

58. Yves Baille, 'Les peintres témoins de l'histoire (à propos de la peste de 1720 à Marseille)', *Histoire des Sciences Médicales*, 45.1 (2011), 43–44.

59. For more detailed analysis of artworks of the plague, see Ermus, 'Memory and the Representation'; on galley slaves in artworks of the 1720 plague, including those of Serre; see the excellent study by Meredith Martin and Gillian Weiss, *The Sun King at Sea: Maritime Art and Galley Slavery in Louis XIV's France* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2022), pp. 171–218.

60. See <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Michel_Serre-Peste-H%C3%B4tel_de_ville.jpg>.

61. Cited in Baille, 'Les peintres témoins', p. 43. 'The return of a scourge from another age into the decor of Baroque urban modernity, the disorder of death into its orderly architecture'.

62. As precedents to Serre's image of the infant breastfeeding on his plague-ridden mother, Paul Slack cites Raphael's drawing, *Il Morbetto* (c. 1512–1513), and Nicolas Poussin's *La Peste d'Asdod* (1630–1631). Slack, *Plague: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 98.

63. Pichatty, *Journal*, pp. 79–80; and Alyson Sulaski Wyckoff, 'Neonates, Breastfeeding Infants Included in New CDC Guidance on Plague', *AAP News*, 15 July 2021 <https://publications.aap.org/aapnews/news/16597/Neonates-breastfeeding-infants-included-in-new-CDC?autologincheck=redirected> [accessed 6 August 2024].

64. For other written eyewitness accounts of this same scene, see, for instance, the archbishop of Marseille, Henri-François-Xavier de Belsunce's pastoral letter of 22 October 1720, 'Mandement de Mgr. l'Évêque de Marseille, sur la désolation qu'a causé [*sic*] la peste à Marseille, et sur l'établissement de la fête du Sacré-Cœur de Jésus', in *Pièces historiques sur la peste de Marseille*, I, 164–73 (p. 166); an anonymous eyewitness cited by Cindy Ermus confirms the archbishop's testimony, *The Great Plague Scare*, p. 44; as does Bertrand, *Relation*, p. 167.

65. Homer, *The Iliad* (London: Penguin Classics, 1987), pp. 3–5.

66. It is a disturbing ambivalence embodied in the *corbeaux* themselves. On the one hand, these released convicts personify the best of civic selflessness in their quasi-suicidal mission to remove the massed corpses from the streets. On the other, their very name recalls the image of scavenging birds feasting on human and non-human carrion, confirmed also in their infamous reputation as robbers, even murderers, of the dead and dying.

67. Bertrand, *Relation*, p. 512. 'The language and the maxims of the Ancients whose whole application was to observe and follow the workings of nature'.

68. Bertrand, *Relation*, p. 512, italics in the original. 'An effort of nature to drive out a foreign enemy'.

69. For a classic account of the significance of interiority in the formation of early modern selfhood, see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

70. Bertrand, *Relation*, pp. 136, 149–50. 'Enter for a moment into these afflicted houses [...] Let us leave these afflicted places'.

71. See, for example, Bertrand, *Relation*, p. 7; Pichatty, *Journal*, p. 106, although Pichatty's text presents a remarkably secular account of the plague in which even the self-sacrifice of the local clergy is reported primarily as a form of civic heroism. See Pichatty, *Journal*, pp. 90–96.

72. Lydia Barnett, 'The Theology of Climate Change: Sin as Agency in the Enlightenment's Anthropocene', *Environmental History*, 20.2 (2015), 217–37 (p. 219).

73. See Bertrand, *Henri de Belsunce*. For Belsunce's conception of the plague, see his 'Mandement', already cited, pp. 164–73. For a report of his actions during the plague, see Bertrand, *Relation*, pp. 326–27.

74. Pichatty, *Journal*, pp. 81–82. 'One only hears on all sides cries, tears, laments, sobbing, moans, desolation, terror, despair'; see also Bertrand, *Relation*, p. 150.

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